

UN meeting targets 'killer robots'



Michael Møller, Acting Director-General UN Office at Geneva. UN Photo/Violaine Martin

14 May 2014 – The top United Nations official in Geneva has urged bold action by diplomats at the start of the world body's first ever meeting on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS), better known as “killer robots,” telling them: “You have the opportunity to take pre-emptive action and ensure that the ultimate decision to end life remains firmly under human control.”

 [Print](#)

The remarks were made yesterday by Michael Møller, Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, at the opening session of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems taking place this week at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

Ambassador Jean-Hugues Simon-Michel of France, who is chairing the four-day expert meeting, noted: “Lethal autonomous weapons systems are a challenging emerging issue on the disarmament agenda right now,”

The four days of discussions will focus on technological developments, the ethical and sociological questions that arise from the development and deployment of autonomous weapons, as well as the adequacy and legal challenges to international law and the possible impact on military operations, according to the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (ODA).

The Geneva meeting has attracted record attendance by States, UN organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations, ODA said.

UN [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon took note of “killer robots” in his report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict issued in November 2013, saying important questions have been raised as to the ability of such systems to operate in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

“Is it morally acceptable to delegate decisions about the use of lethal force to such systems? If their use results in a war crime or serious human rights violation, who would be legally responsible? If responsibility cannot be determined as required by international law, is it legal or ethical to deploy such systems,?” he asked.

The Secretary-General went on to say: “Although autonomous weapons systems have not yet been deployed and the extent of their development as a military technology remains unclear, discussion of such questions must begin immediately and not once the technology has been developed and proliferated.”

While noting the Meeting of Experts was only a first step towards addressing lethal autonomous weapons, Acting Director-General Møeller urged the delegates gathered in Geneva to take bold action.

“All too often international law only responds to atrocities and suffering once it has happened,' Mr. Moeller said and noted that Geneva has had “a historical record that is second to none for achieving results in disarmament and international humanitarian law negotiations.”

The outcomes of the Geneva discussions will be submitted to the formal conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in November 2014, where States will discuss possible next steps on autonomous weapons.

The purpose of the Convention is to ban or restrict the use of specific types of weapons that are considered to cause unnecessary or unjustifiable suffering to combatants or to affect civilians indiscriminately.

Currently 117 States are parties to the Convention.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue
[UN human rights expert urges global pause in creation of robots with ‘power to kill’](#)

Related Stories



[2015 pivotal for finalizing universal climate change agreement, Ban tells Member States](#)



[New software may allow better protection of endangered shark species, says UN agency](#)



[Iran: UN experts urge ‘immediate halt’ over scheduled execution of juvenile](#)



[UN officials deplore ‘horrendous’ murder of woman in Turkey](#)



Invest in cities, renewable energy, UN envoy Michael Bloomberg tells conference in India

In-depth Interviews



Nicholas Kay, UN Envoy for Somalia



Navi Pillay, Former High Commissioner for Human Rights



Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs

Secretary-General

- All Statements
- Selected Speeches
- Off-the-cuff Remarks
- Official Travels

Spokesperson's Office

- Latest Statements
- Briefing Highlights
- Briefing Transcripts
- Press Conferences
- Notes to Correspondents

Tools and Services

[UN Daily News](#)

[UN System Links](#)

[Peacekeeping](#)

[Political Missions](#)

[UN Publications](#)

[Maps](#)

[Databases](#)

[News Magazines](#)

Social Media

[RSS](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Flickr](#)

[YouTube](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Contact](#)



UN News Centre
with breaking news from the UN News Service